



## The Philippine Community of Aruba is joined by local dignitaries in observing Independence Day

Aruba is a “melting pot” of over forty ethnic groups, and the expatriate community from the Republic of the Philippines counts itself more than 3000 strong. A community that reveres its historical and cultural heritage gathered together in the Wilhelmina Park in Oranjestad on Monday morning to raise side by side the flag of the Republic of the Philippines with the Aruban Flag and revere the Philippine Independence Day.

Joe Bello, President of UFILCOA (United Filipino Community of Aruba) welcomed The Ambassador of the Philippines to Venezuela, the Honorable Ronald B. Allerey, who has come to join his fellow Filipinos for the occasion, plus members of parliament and the Minister of Justice Rudy Croes.

Most of the men were garbed in a traditional Filipino dress shirts called “Barong Tagalog,” that are highly valued and often passed down from generation to generation. They are beautifully embroidered and made of rare and sturdy materials such as hand woven coconut, banana or pineapple fiber.

The ceremony began with the singing of the Philippine National Anthem by the group Sampaguita, and Frances Jacobs sang the Aruban National Anthem. Local TV and news personality Annalisa Gesterkamp was the Master of Ceremonies, giving a brief description of the republic consisting of 7107 islands at low tide, of which approximately one hundred are occupied with a population of eighty-five million people celebrating 107 years of independence from Spanish rule. Addressing the gathering was local Filipino community leaders Joe Bello and Ami Henriquez-Mendez, who expressed their gratitude to the Aruban people for so warmly welcoming the Philippine people into the Aruban population and giving them the opportunity to flourish and prosper on “this beautiful island.” Ami expressed their desire to integrate and assimilate into the culture of Aruba. Joe Bello declared, “for the fifteen years I have stayed in this beautiful land, I can not imagine how my life would have been if I could not have offered by service to these people who are so full of hospitality.....I cannot say any single word, but be very thankful to Almighty God for letting us dwell in this land, in working and letting you all be a part of our lives. The service we can do in our little way, with this gathering may we make a promise to this people, who have been very kind in sharing with us their great nation....through their kindness we will trust, through their hospitality we have created friendship, and through this one-of-a-kind relationship we pledge our loyalty, support, and continuing efforts. As we raise the flags of these two great nations, we are also raising our pride to the world.”

Ambassador Allerey then briefly addressed the group, thanking them for sharing this day with the Filipino people of Aruba. He declared the community “looks forward to a further strengthening and enhancement of Philippine-Aruban ties. To our Aruban brothers and sisters we offer a warm fraternal embrace.” He finished his speech in the Filipino language with the statement “Long live the Philippines and long live Aruba!” Afterward, everyone was invited to an informal reception at the Fort Zoutman with typical Filipino snacks and champagne to toast the occasion.

The official Philippine day of Independence was on Sunday, June 12, when over 400 members of the Filipino community attended a commemorative mass at the Santa Ana Church in Noord then a gala celebration in the evening at the Aruba Hyatt Regency Resort and Stellaris Casino. Monday morning marked the governmental observance with the traditional placing of wreaths, and a show of unity with the officials of their host country, a ceremony also being held by the approximate eight million expatriated Filipinos living around the world.